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## Statement of Nancy Freeman, Groundwater Awareness League Water Issues Town Hall July 1st, 2008

### **Finding—and keeping--water in the desert**

We appreciate this opportunity to address the water situation in this region, with an emphasis on any action that could be taken on the Federal level. Several laws could be enacted by the Feds to save the states from their own short-sighted legislators, who are often ranchers and irrigation farmers—a phenomenon that exists not only in Arizona, but throughout the western U.S. and probably the mid-West.

Federal regulation will be necessary to coax the states to use better water management—after all, the Feds are the ones who are expected to bail the states out when the crisis comes. For example, the Federal government has given the authority to the states to manage water in public lands. This policy has created a tremendous loss of trees—counted to be in the millions in Arizona. The forests need enough water to survive—even reserves for drought conditions. The major problems are in Prescott, Sedona and Flagstaff, but the issue is creeping across the state. Plenty of dead trees are now visible in the Santa Ritas. And where will we get the water for fighting the ever-increasing wildfire challenge?

### **Federal Level**

I am sure that there are water problems in other states. Here are a couple of suggestions for the Federal Government to make some changes that would help water management in all of the Midwest.

1. Subsidized cotton payments should be stopped in regions that do not have the water to sustain groundwater water levels.
2. There should be a national law that forces the states to connect surface and groundwater, so that groundwater pumpers cannot rob rivers, streams and creeks of their water.  
[Arizona is not the only state with this scientific discrepancy in water law.]
3. Protecting water levels in National Forests to maintain the animals and plants. As I say, birds and animals are not “intelligent” enough to pump the water table down to 1,000 feet and then decide what to do.

## **State level**

There are many “holes in the bucket” in Arizona law. We are arranging to have some mini-seminars with state legislators to give them some guidance on what needs to be done. It’s a work in progress, so feel free to send me your suggestions.

1. Stipulate that Groundwater Replenishment District (GWRD) water has to be delivered directly to water company, or recharged within three miles of user. The GWRD is criticized for having paper water, but the truth is they do not even have paper water to fulfill their obligations into the future. GWRD members (homes built after 1995) are going to be facing increasing water GWRD taxes on their property tax bill.
2. Limit exempt wells, or at least subject them to impact rules on the neighboring wells.
3. Identify specific riparian areas and limit pumping adjacent to them to prevent draining of these areas.
4. Allow AMA’s to create sub-basin—smaller management areas, needed in such areas as Arivaca, Saddle Brooke and Queen Creek.
5. If there is a shortage on the Colorado River, golf courses are included in the industrial category of water users, which puts them in the priority *Municipal and Industrial* category. The courses should be removed from this top category and be moved down the list.
6. People should be designated as the highest and best use of water; then food agriculture; then mining (because it’s a heavy water user), golf courses and non-food agriculture, such as cotton.
7. New mining operations should be subjected to well impact qualifications, just as are other industrial users.
8. Agriculture should be divided between food crops, animal food and non-food crops, such as cotton, and water should be dispersed on the CAP priority list accordingly in case of a shortage.
9. Indian CAP water should be subject to the same categories as the standard CAP allocations for the rest of the state, especially Indian cotton should be moved down the list in case of a shortage on the Colorado River.

## **Local Government**

1. Require nurseries to sell only low water native-type plants. Appropriate lists can easily be compiled by the Phoenix and Tucson Botanical Gardens.
2. Fines for watering the sidewalks and streets.
3. Sane, scientific regulation of wastewater, which is now considered a valuable commodity. Green Valley’s wastewater is a case in point. Two acre lawn for a dog park indeed.
4. Regulation to prevent the creation of new artificial ponds with groundwater, such as the 350 acre-foot pond at Canoa golf course.

## **Some Basic Projects**

To accomplish some of the recommended solutions, some laws listed above will have to be enacted. But there are some projects we can start immediately.

**Federal:** Install a deep trough down the center of the Santa Cruz River flow. This would serve to convey the waters to a deeper level, so they could soak in, rather than spreading out over 1/8

mile in some areas. In other words, actually manage the water we have available. To the nay-sayers touting we can't do anything because of surface water rights, we can apply for surface water rights too!

**Federal:** Fish barriers and inflatable mini-dams to slow down the water. The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) does have to install some fish barriers because of an endangered species issue. Although everyone agreed that it would serve Green Valley to have them in this region to help the groundwater deficit, they are not going to be put in this area.

**Local Government:** Recharge basins to collect storm water with dry wells to enable the water to permeate to 100 feet or so (average groundwater level is 300 ft). The basins could be of all sizes from acres to lots. The huge golf courses have areas that could be drained to recharge basin with a dry well. Chandler has created large recharge basins at every park, ball field and around subdivisions in to enhance the landscape. I think Chandler is the most beautiful manufactured town in Arizona. So they have done the work; we just have to follow the model. Also, some developers here have already done worthwhile projects here.

**Local Government:** Require all HOA's and businesses to use xeriscaping.

**Local Government:** Stormwater reservoirs in local mountains. California and Colorado have great mountain reservoirs that serve as recreational fishing holes.

**Residents:** Water harvesting and xeriscaping practices. Adjust irrigation system timer during winter and summer rains.

**Residents:** Small check dams through out the region could be created by all residents, including on their own property. The higher on the watershed, the better, but every bit helps. There are many good resources at U of A. Water Wise has done some projects in Sierra Vista along the roads and has a water stewards program.

**Residents:** Maintain soil levels below the curb level, so that water stays on the property. Also, in places that water runs down streets, use curb cuts divert some of the flow onto the soil to water vegetation and soak into the ground.

**Combined effort:**

Several of us have had a dream of having a river park and community/peace garden. Besides affirming that we have a river that runs through our town, this facility could combine recharge facilities, water recycling, and water harvesting.